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ABSTRACT

The Literacy Education Action (LEA) program was established in the fall of 1985 under the initiative of the president of the El Paso Community College (Texas). During 1985 and 1986, LEA concentrated on developing its own literacy tutoring program, including recruiting and training volunteers and community members with reading skills below the sixth grade level. Using a language experience approach, assistance was provided for native English-speakers, Spanish-speakers, and bilingual individuals. In fall 1986, LEA opened a literacy center on the Rio Grande campus of El Paso Community College, and drop-in tutoring, computer-assisted instruction and small group instruction were added to the program. Program staff, offerings, and support were expanded with grant funding. Since 1986, LEA has developed a network of community literacy groups and provided support to other groups involved in literacy activities, assisting with fund raising from public and private sources and with leadership in establishing English as a Second Language and family literacy classes, a computerized referral program, and community literacy awareness activities. In October 1987, the state funded a program of live interactive televised instruction. Prevocational and worksite literacy programs emerged through this program and the involvement of the Levi Strauss company. In 1988, efforts focused on improving and expanding the volunteer tutoring program, open-entry/open-exit vocational courses, development of an instructional model for teaching literacy to vocational students, and short-term job training for individuals with learning disabilities. (MSE) (Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse on Literacy Education)

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LITERACY EDUCATION ACTION

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EL PASO COMMUNITY COLLEGE

MARCH 8, 1989

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LITERACY EDUCATION ACTION
March 8, 1989

The Literacy Education Action (LEA) program was established in the fall of 1985, under the initiative of the President of El Paso Community College, Dr. Robert Shepack. At the time, Sandra Tate, a member of the English faculty, was released from full-time teaching responsibilities to coordinate the program. Reporting to the Vice-President of Instruction, Ms. Tate worked with faculty members from the reading, sociology and ESL disciplines to implement the plan of action for the program. LEA is now institutionalized, with a full-time director, Dr. Carol Clymer, who reports to the Dean of College and Community Educational Development.

During 1985 and 1986, LEA concentrated on developing its own literacy tutoring program, including recruiting and training volunteer tutors and recruiting community members with reading skills below the sixth grade. Using a language experience teaching approach, assistance is provided for English speakers, Spanish speakers, and bilingual individuals. Since its inception, the volunteer tutoring program has trained over 500 volunteer tutors and tutored more than 500 community members. Currently, LEA arranges tutor/student matches in over 23 sites throughout the County. Sites include all three campuses of El Paso Community College, five YWCA's, four YMCA's, ten libraries and various churches.

In the fall of 1986, LEA opened the Literacy Center at the Rio Grande Campus of El Paso Community College (downtown). The Center is the hub of all LEA activities. In addition to volunteer tutoring, a variety of other services were added to the program offerings. Drop-in tutoring, computer assisted instruction, and small group instruction became available from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Monday through Thursday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Friday and 8 a.m. until noon on Saturday.

During 1986 and 1987, Sandra Tate focused a great deal of time and energy writing grants to expand the services of LEA. Her efforts came to fruition and LEA received funding from several different sources. A Levi Strauss foundation grant was awarded for seed money for LEA programs. These funds enabled the purchase of an Apple II computer for computer assisted instruction and the support of one full-time and one part-time tutor coordinator. With these funds, LEA was able to expand its tutoring programs and other services.

Since 1986, LEA has provided leadership in developing a network of community literacy groups and providing support to other groups in literacy activities. The College obtained a grant from the Urban Literacy Network to fund the El Paso Literacy Coalition, and we assisted the El Paso Public Libraries to receive funding through the Texas State Libraries and Archives Commission in order to offer ESL literacy classes, family literacy classes and computerized assisted instruction at the libraries. A total of 13 ESL and 9 family literacy classes have been offered at 4 libraries with over 850 participants. A clearinghouse directory was published that lists all literacy related classes in El Paso. Further, a computerized referral program was developed in order to provide appropriate information to students regarding other services and programs in the County. Finally, the College works closely with the local media on literacy awareness activities, including cooperation with the El Paso Herald-Post in its Year of the Printed Word program and the local PBS and ABC stations in Project PLUS. Recently, Project PLUS selected a student enrolled in our televised literacy class at Levi Strauss to be the "Learner of the Month." In September of 1988, Rosa Segura was featured on PLUS public service announcements which aired on network television.

Other leadership efforts undertaken in the summer of 1988 included developing an agreement with the Paso Del Norte Literacy Council to support

Laubach Literacy International activities, serving on the Board of the El Paso Literacy Coalition, and serving on the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board Literacy Task Force.

Funds for family literacy activities were awarded directly to LEA from the Texas Education Agency in 1986 and again in 1987. The purpose of this project is to provide literacy instruction for parents of preschool and primary school children in a setting where the parents are taught to help their children and the same time develop their own literacy skills. This project features a five step curriculum that includes literacy skills development as well as development in appropriate role modeling behavior. In addition to implementing this project at the Literacy Center, three public libraries and the Ysleta Independent School District Pre-kindergarten Center, the model for the program has been disseminated throughout Texas. A state conference on the project was held in El Paso in November of 1987, and project staff have made numerous technical visits in Texas and presentations at national conferences to help practitioners implement the model. A comprehensive handbook and instructional videotape have been developed and distributed to over 200 individuals throughout the state and nation.

The wide dissemination of the model and broad interest in its implementation resulted in a national publication, Vista, highlighting the program in February 1988 and 1989 issues. This program has been expanded through a Department of Education Bilingual Family Literacy grant. As one of nineteen projects funded in the nation, we have implemented the family literacy program in three local school districts. We will add two more districts in 1989 and teach local PTA's to utilize the model. Implementation of this grant has enabled us to further disseminate the model nationally as well.

In October 1987, The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board funded Tele-LEA. This program involves live interactive televised instruction using the

Instructional Television Fixed Services System for ESL and non-ESL instruction. Four levels of pre-vocational literacy courses were developed and implemented at ten different sites in El Paso. Sites include community housing projects, public schools, Levi Strauss plants, community centers, a church and the Literacy Center. More than 800 students have been served through these classes.

The inclusion of Levi Strauss in this program has enabled LEA to take a leadership role in the development of workplace literacy programs. This project was featured in a presentation at the Education Commission of the States Adult Literacy Summit on August 10, 1988, was highlighted in the Summer 1988 issue of SERAMERICA, as well as was the focus of an ABC PLUS Public Service Announcement in September.

Throughout 1988, we have worked on improving and expanding the volunteer tutoring program. Monthly enrichment sessions have been added to our training program which cover a variety of topics from learning disabilities to those in the National Issues Forum. Participation in the Forum has gained LEA special national recognition. This program, administered by the Domestic Policy Association of the Kettering Foundation, consists of community discussions held in the manner of old "Town Meetings", where participants throughout the country read issue books covering three topics of national interest during the year. The books provide background information for Forum issues and opinions are compiled and delivered to policymakers in Washington D.C. LEA is one of the few Forum sponsors to include literacy students in the discussion groups. The Kettering Foundation is keenly interested in the positive results of literacy students' involvement and are working with us to develop a special issue book on the subject of the book. Plans to distribute the book statewide and possibly nationally are forthcoming.

Our drop-in tutoring program has increased significantly since its inception. We serve approximately 300 students per semester in this program. These students come daily to learn to read, write, and speak English. Additionally, we are working on expanding our drop-in program to all EPCC campuses and three other sites in the County: San Elizario, Canutillo and the Paso Del Norte Literacy Council.

To assist single parents and homemakers obtain employment, we are working with the College's Adult Vocational Training Center (AVTC). This program involves offering four separate courses for ESL and non-ESL students with low literacy levels who are trying to prepare for the open entry/open exit vocational courses offered by the AVTC. The courses have been developed according to the vocational content required and address certain affective learning issues of single parent and homemakers needing literacy instruction. There are currently 58 students in these classes offered at seven sites.

Another grant that we recently received from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board involves the development of an instructional model for teaching literacy to vocational students. This project tests the curriculum that is utilized in our Intergenerational Literacy Project where children and adults learn together. We have developed literacy courses using this curriculum for adults only. Over 40 students are participating in this program in the Northeast area of El Paso.

Finally, on September 1, 1988, we begin Project CAREER. This program, funded by the Department of Education Post Secondary Education Programs for Handicapped Persons, provides short term job training in at least seven occupational areas for the learning disabled adult. Instruction will begin in April of 1989.

From its inception in 1985, in less than 4 years, LEA has become an established and strong program not only within the College and El Paso communities, but has also provided leadership in the state and national literacy movement. A sincere and solid institutional commitment provided the support and impetus to attain these achievements. This commitment is rare but vital to the eradication of illiteracy. We know we have a long way to go, but we have a strong vehicle to get there.